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Two 20th Century Images of Man

Leroy E. Aasland

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TWO 20TH CENTURY IMAGES OF MAN

by

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B.A. in Art, Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota 1957

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

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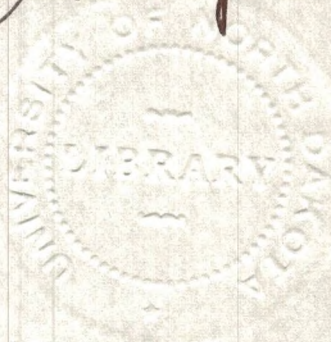
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This thesis submitted by Leroy E. Aasland in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the University of North Dakota, is hereby approved by the Committee under whom the work has been done.

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INTRODUCTION

Writer and critic, Selden Rodman, stated in an article in Art in America:

But although most of the talent of recent years concerned itself with dehumanized improvisation, I continued to regret the self-imposed limitation of these artists' gifts and to deplore the shrill insistence that the communication of commitment to human values in representational terms was no longer permissible. Today there are signs of counter-revolution growing from German Expressionism.¹

Rodman contends that there exists in art today a reaction against extreme formalism's (abstract expressionism or non-objectivism) trend towards a dehumanized art. This reaction is not considered part of a particular school or movement but a humanist trend that is apparent in the work of some individual contemporary artists. These artists lean toward traditionalism but not to the extent of reviving a neo-classicism. Rodman has termed these artists - "Insiders." Manny Farber, painter and writer, stated in a critical review of Rodman's treatise:

Rodman is here championing a small group of 'post-abstract expressionists,' called Insiders who portray the common people, often with slat figures and bulbous heads, bathing in a blackish, sea-green type of coloring, framed as statically as in a Time cover portraiture. In Rodman's original view of art history, there have been a few craftsmen in each country who managed to bring a meta-physical, concerned feeling for sick humanity and were able to communicate with a total artistry.²

There is one general consensus today that there exists "limbo artists," as Farber described, "who stand in a decorously eclectic position between realism and abstract expressionism."³ An attempt

¹Selden Rodman, "A writer as Collector," Art in America, XLVI (Summer, 1958), 29.

²Manny Farber, "'Insiders' and Others," Arts, XXXV (January, 1961), 44.

³Farber, XXXV, 44.

is therefore made in this thesis to answer the question: What has this Insider concept to offer to its contemporary society? It must be said that today's age of technological advancement is best represented by the greater abstractions. Alongside this contemporary emphasis lies the Insider segment of traditionalism. It is a contemporary traditionalism. Perhaps in this context it could also be labeled as stagnant and "safe" in relationship to the progressive character of pure abstraction; but, the humanism it attempts to clearly portray does necessarily represent a break from the "modernist" trend.

This new humanistic imagery had been described earlier in the introduction as "a counter-revolution growing from German Expressionism." This statement warranted further investigation through a critical interpretation of the motives and character of the German movement. It is the author's contention in this thesis that the motives of German Expressionism and what it spiritually offered to its society, provide a comparative answer for the relationship of man's new imagery to its society. In the same instance the author does not feel as "the socially concerned critic who seems driven by feelings of contemporary disaster to legislate for the Insiders"--a reference made to Rodman's "road searching"⁴--but simply as a limbo artist himself. It is in this spirit that the author's prints and drawings are included in this thesis as supporting plastic analyses.

Although mention is made of the influential art movements and various social repercussions, they are not of primary concern in this thesis. The concern lies with the expressive motives behind the particular art trend discussed. These motives are reaffirmed by the personal statements of artists that the author feels best represent that trend. Although the discussions of pertinent art movements or concepts may imply various visual art media, the emphasis in this thesis is directed toward the graphic media.

Finally, it must be emphasized that it is not the author's contention to hold in esteem one art concept over another or to belittle through comparisons. Creative expression and its direction is, of course, a purely individualistic fulfillment.

⁴ Ibid.

1. LITERATURE ANALYSIS

German Expressionism

Late 19th and early 20th century art in Europe had experienced great changes. These changes coincided with a new social awareness that was taking place. The restrictions of tradition were being overcome in which a totally new existence was being perceived and felt. Artists were devising the means to explore the sensations and the mysteries that this diversitory world was offering. Early attempts were made through a technical means, while later attempts sought to destroy conventions that were binding the spiritual essence of the exploration. The latter was a manifestation of the total Expressionist reaction. This significant phase in the evolution of modern forms found important counter-parts in French raison and German vehemence. While the former was moving more toward the emotional essence of form, the German movement was making its universality heard through an almost ecstatic search for the "New Man" of that time. It was, therefore, destined for two worlds--the real and the unreal. Conflict was its heritage; as Bernard Myers stated:

This burning preoccupation with a new humanity, the driving force of Expressionism, may be presented positively as an ideal or⁵ negatively as opposition to the forces denying its emergence.⁵

A foundation of concept and humanism.--The radical changes in style have taken place throughout the history of art. A change, for instance, had taken place in the Medieval rejection of realism and the Renaissance reacceptance of realism. Concept was Medieval man's total involvement in his unseen world. The Renaissance man sought to reverse this allegiance to the otherworldly to a new faith in man and his reason. Man was to become the measure. This shift to man as a product of his society was reaffirmed in his creative efforts through extreme realism.

⁵Bernard S. Myers, The German Expressionists (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1956), p. 38.

The introspective character of religious mysticism and the spirit of humanism have naturally left their marks in art today. These two attributes influenced the transformation in art toward the modern era at the turn of the 20th century and were particularly drawn upon by the German Expressionists. Their "glory was in the mysticism of the Middle Ages;" the otherworldly, the infinite, and the concept of "redemption through suffering."⁶ A humanistic feeling was evident in their sympathy for the oppressed types and their general belief in a universal brotherhood. The human concern is dramatically revealed by this Expressionist statement:

We say the City--but we do not mean its houses and factories, its goods and its waste matter; what we mean is its millions of people--not their number, forget the number, not a crowd, but rather these individual people naked under their clothes, blood coursing under their skins, all of those whose exposed heartbeats together would drown out the united voices of its machines.⁷

A foundation of conflict.--The early Expressionist 19th century was one of social revolution. Nationalism was being voiced in which countries of the world were declaring a cultural unity within their borders. The battle of ideologies was beginning. A democratic, bourgeois society was rising to the front with a doctrine of capitalism. This meant the rise of a new industrialism and the development of technology. Individualism was to be affirmed; creating new fervor in a cultural tumult.

If, as has been said, Expressionism is a 'revelation of the profoundly problematic condition of Europe at the turn of the century' Germany had more problems than many other countries, some native to the period itself but more stemming from the past.

Germany was not immediately part of this 19th century social revolution due to the ramifications of the Reformation. This country was now a federation of disunified principalities with weak nationalistic ties. It was a time of political conflict; of philosophical concepts that had no identification with the contemporary life. A background of religious

⁶ Ibid., p. 37.

⁷ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

⁸ Ibid., p. 11.

conflict and political division produced, what has been called, the individual in isolation; restricted by social and cultural taboos.⁹ The individual revolted against the authoritarianism of the day which was embedded in his own Germanic cultural ideals of respect and order. By the end of the 19th century, Germany voiced its own nationalism under the organization of a military aristocracy. By this time it had also asserted itself as a middle class nation through industrial growth. New social and economic forces were released. Unified quests of new nationalistic goals were undertaken. At the turn of the century Germany was ready to enter the modern era and to engage itself in a world war. A background of internal conflict and finally a world war provided the basic provocation to be met by a creative frenzy.

An Impressionist foundation.--While Germany was engaged with internal chaos, France was making great strides towards the nationalistic state. This unity was reflected in French dominated 19th century art. French democracy was giving rise to numerous individual artists and groups of artists. The French reverence for disciplines of the mind gave rise to new artistic intellectualisms in a society affected by increasing industrialism and technology. Individualism and intellectualism became the basic ingredients of a new school--Impressionism. This school, through its direct visual contact with nature in pure color, created a definite break with academic traditions of confined form. Their theory of painting was based on two main principles:

1. The attempt to capture a fleeting, atmospheric impression of nature, as though seen for the first time, and in relation to the constantly changing circumstances of light.
2. The employment of the spectrum range of colors, these being, scientifically the only ones consistent with the theory of light is primarily important.¹⁰

The Impressionists did not escape the wrath of their contemporaries. They were "attacked for being revolutionists, incompetents, anarchists, and perversley immoral, i.e., on aesthetic, political, moral and social

⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰ Mervyn Levy (ed.), Dictionary of Art Terms (Greenwich: New York Graphic Society, 1961), p. 47.

grounds."¹¹ This, of course, has been the pattern throughout the history of art and it is, perhaps, indicative, even in a more contemporary sense, of the wrath that has been bestowed upon modern formalism's accendency.

A timeless answer is provided in this statement:

A man who brings a new idea to the courts of public opinion invites the wrath of the complacent, the stupid and the ignorant along with the considered judgment of his peers. Many conflicts are bound to occur since every individual is inclined to invest himself with authority, especially in matters involving aesthetic judgment.¹²

Even though at first rejected, Impressionism was actually in accord with the character of its society. It has been stated that Impressionism was "characterized by an unconditional affirmation of modern life" where nature was viewed as mastered by technology and "technology viewed as friendly to human progress."¹³ This was an obvious acquiescence to the new industrialism.

The Impressionists had created a formalism of scientific overture. In the attainment of the pure visual sensation, profound content became void. This is exemplified in a statement describing the "cool objectivity" of Impressionist, Edouard Manet: "Manet addressed himself exclusively to the eye; the people in his canvas were not so much humans as forms."¹⁴ This objectivity, however, affirmed a new 19th century optimism; bathed in sensibility and reflected in the new age of science. The Post-Impressionists under Cezanne and Seurat later attempted to re-emphasize structure; Van Gogh added the psychic quality of spasmodic color. It was this later movement that received the attention of the Expressionists.

An inner commitment.--The Expressionist was drawn to the Medieval concept of the otherworldly. Social pressures in the form of authoritarianism had been the cause of this Medievalism. Reality which was suppressed by the physical world could only be re-discovered through the mystical;

¹¹David M. Robb and J.J. Garrison, Art in the Western World (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1953), p. 794.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Werner Haftmann, Painting in the Twentieth Century (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1960), I, 18.

¹⁴Minneapolis Tribune, June 9, 1963, p. 12.

a world of religious introspection. The religious emotional ingredient was found to be basic to the German Expressionist. This provided the needed fulfillment of a force, greater than the outer pressures, in which this Expressionist could lose himself. He had to relinquish his worldly inhibitions to discover that which was infinite in nature. To Expressionist, Emil Nolde, "nature was a reality that was situated beneath the visible and merely shone through it."¹⁵ In the unknown darkness of the Medieval mystic the Expressionist found reason for the demoniac and primeval in his own psychic quests. The spiritual leader of the German movement, Ernst Kirchner, stated:

It is something secret, that which lies beyond people and things, beyond colors and frame, and which reunites everything with life and perceptible appearance--that is the beautiful thing I seek.¹⁶

This feeling for the primeval was also inspired by the purity of primitive art; however, the basic mediatory quality of religion was needed to establish the bond between, what has been called, the autistic vision and the visible world. The Nordic quality of introspection must also be mentioned. Painters like the Norwegian, Edvard Munch and the Belgian, James Ensor greatly affected the inwardness of the Expressionists. On the other hand, it must be noted that the German character had already been primed in this direction through the affects of religious conflicts and social chaos. The basic Germanic artistic thought has been expressed in this statement:

How basically different are Germanic and Latin artistic creation: The Latin attains his form from the object, from the form in nature. The German creates his from out of fantasy, out of his inner vision and the form of visible nature is a symbol to him...For the Latin beauty lies in appearance, the other seeks it beyond things.¹⁷

An escape from the German social pattern was essential. This pattern was a hinderance to, what has been called, the Expressionist concepts of freedom of the whole man and spontaneous response to reality. The escape from such social frustrations meant a turn to the inner life. From the position of this psychic core, energies could be

¹⁵Haftmann, I, 85.

¹⁶Myers, p. 126.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 128.

diverted to an analytical destruction of those impositions. This was valid in that the "Expressionists attempted to destroy the appearance of things to arrive at the non-rational and spiritual values."¹⁸ This spirit of protest was inherent in the isolated conditions of the early Expressionists. Even as groups were later formed in the early 20th century to gain stability, this concept of individualism was still unleashed against a junkerist background.

A human commitment.--Humanism, idealistic concepts of universal brotherhood and individualism naturally point to the humanitarian tendencies of the German movement. Kirchner stated:

I wanted to express the richness and joy of living, to paint humanity at work and play in its reactions and interreactions, and to express love as well as hatred.¹⁹

Though Kirchner's was a self-centered interest in humanity, it none the less points out a basic Expressionist interest in human problems. Erich Heckel, a less violent but more lyrical Expressionist, had a sympathy for "the little man." This feeling extended to the confused, hemmed in creatures....his unhappy fellow men.²⁰ Existing social values were also an influence to this humanistic feeling, but did not provide the total inspiration. Kirchner expressed his humanism through, what was called, the "psychological depths of megalopolitan anti-nature."²¹ Heckel expressed his feeling for stricken mankind in a state of withdrawal and doubt. Nolde, though considered less humanistic, looked to his early peasant and religious background.

A humanistic reaction was also indicated in the rejection of Impressionist surface phenomena. The pure use of color and abbreviated form greatly influenced the Expressionists, but not the superficial emphasis on humanity. The Expressionist soul searching required a break

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 128.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 146.

²¹ Haftmann, I, 90.

through the superficial to the psychic realms of man. A reaction against surface formalism was indicated in this early 20th century definition of Expressionism: "...not photographers, but people overcome by visions; not concerned with catching the 'momentary effect of a situation' but its 'eternal significance.'"²² In this sense the eternal would be found in the "souls" of man and nature.

A meaningful commitment.--On the basis of the analysis presented it could be said that German Expressionism offered two meaningful statements to its society--individualism and escape. To this authoritarian oriented society, a spirit of individualism was obvious in Expressionist vitality and spontaneity alone; but a deeper spirit could be felt in the pictorial manner in which the spectator was confronted with the almost overbearing psychological presence of one man. Myers described this impact on the spectator as an "individual temperament that almost overwhelms him and that shakes his confidence in ordinary things."²³

At the same time the Expressionist provided an outward spirit of individualism, he also recognized the inner self. Here in the contemplative thoughts of the otherworldly and the yearnings for the eternal, the individual could escape from the positivism surrounding him. The "pantheistic humanitarianism" of the Expressionist conveyed an eternal region in the midst of everyday reality. For the "mystical-minded audience," Myers stated, the Medieval man could be lifted "above the cares of the world" or swung "into the orbit of a fear-laden psychology."²⁴

²²Myers, p. 36.

²³Ibid., p. 40.

²⁴Ibid.

The Contemporaries

Against the Expressionist background some comparisons can be made, at least in spirit, to today's attempt to reassert the human predicament in quasi-representational form. It has been called a restatement of commitment to human values. Peter Selz has called the new imagery an exploration of the "realities of man."²⁵ It was seen that the Expressionists opposed that concept that only touched upon the surface of human content. This was an early 20th century reaction against Impressionist theory. Today's reaction against what has been termed extreme formalism is essentially of the same spirit. Rodman has called this modern formalism non-humanistic. This is true in the sense of commitment to the reality of man through acceptance of the natural world. The formalists, on the other hand, declare a reality of form. This reality must be considered on its own merit and what it holds for those exponents of extreme formalism.

The reality of form.--In a sense all art has been abstract. The incongruities of natural appearance has lent itself time and again to some degree of needed formal structure. An abstract work may still retain some natural form. This is not true for the extreme formalists who see abstraction, not as a method alone, but as an expressive concept in itself.

Haftmann has stated:

The term 'abstract painting' is today violently rejected by the very artists who have dropped all reference to natural forms. And indeed it is merely a crude designation for an art which moves in the realm of the non-representational.²⁶

These contemporaries who reject natural forms must then turn to a pictorial reality of formal elements. In this connection Haftmann again stated:

²⁵Peter Selz, New Images of Man (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), p. 13.

²⁶Haftmann, I, 337.

Contemporary no-objective painters persist in regarding form as a concrete reality....The painter no longer works with the finished forms to be found in nature; the formal elements constitute his field of action. From this point of view it is true that, as Doesburg put it, 'nothing is more concrete and real than a line, a colour, a plane.'²⁷

It must be said that this is a valid reality today. A comparison can be made here in recalling what had inspired the formal reality of the 19th century Impressionists. A new democratic zeal and an acquiescence to the new scientific age had basically produced the first radical break from the confinement of tradition; both socially and artistically. The ephemeral forms of Impressionism was resultant. Today's formalism also finds its origins in democracy and technology.

The drive to reinstate democratic freedoms after World War II was not totally looked upon as an idealistic saving grace. At this time European culture was caught between in an anxiety to return to the security of tradition and yet still keep pace with growing modern responsibilities. This was reflected in its art. Christianity, Humanism, and Democracy had survived the war. The desire to return to the security of these ideas was to overshadow, what was called, the "rootless freedom" of the modernist;²⁸ but, the freedom asserted by the modernist could not be denied. The isolated European artists of the war years had urged a new creative freedom. This was joined by the new expressive freedom already underway in the United States. The formalism that evolved was universal in nature. The limitless space it asserted conformed to democratic idealism. In this boundless use of space the "idea" was to be sacrificed to make this a clean break from tradition. Its visual thematic and humanistic representatives were to be discarded. In this regard Clement Greenberg expressed a characteristic attribute of modern formalism.

It can teach us, by example, how valuable so much in life can be made without being interested in ulterior motives....It provides the arch example of something that does not have to mean, or be, useful for, anything other than itself. It gives us no imaginary space

²⁷Ibid., I, 338.

²⁸Ibid., I, 311.

through which to walk with the mind's eye....We are left alone with shapes and colors....It expands our capacity for experience.²⁹

Technology further confirms the modern reality of form. The direct manipulation of the formal elements lends itself to transposing the dynamic energies of technology. This scientific affirmation is elaborated on by Haftmann:

The new scientific view of the world, in which substance is identified with energy, space with time, and finitude with infinity has profoundly influenced the modern artist. He believes that new scientific concepts such as sub-atomic structures, the field of energy which has taken the place of things, require that he should contemplate not the finished outside forms of nature, but its dynamic energies, its active essence.³⁰

The employment of the intuitive creative act is in keeping with the exploration of these shifting energies. Intuition in the present cosmos of technology is indicated by abstract expressionist, Georges Mathieu: "The modern artist now joins the modern physicist in exploration of an universe beyond good and evil, unsubject to reason."³¹

A democratic spirit characterized the atmospheric surface of the Impressionists as well as the spacial intrigues of the modern formalists. Impressionism conformed to scientific progress and methodology. For today's formalism science provides, not a method subject to reason, but inspiration through its energetic realm of unknowns.

All that is embodied in the new imagery of man and his values is naturally opposed to what has been called a "non-committal" statement; but, according to Haftmann, commitment or preservation of human and objective values does not necessarily call for representational form.³² In this sense the formalist sacrifices natural appearance for what is considered a more concrete reality of shape, line, and color. Critic, Clive Bell has written:

²⁹ Selden Rodman, The Insiders (Louisiana State University Press, 1960), p. 19.

³⁰ Haftmann, I, 316.

³¹ Rodman, The Insiders, p. 29.

³² Haftmann, I, 318-320.

The representative element in a work of art may or may not be harmful; always it is irrelevant. For to appreciate a work of art we need to bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions....The pure mathematician rapt in his studio knows a state of mind which I take to be similar if not identical.³³

Thomas Hess has also written:

Enjoyment of a painting has nothing to do with its species of subject, the accuracy with which this subject is represented, or the moral, political or subconscious motives of the artist. The appearance of, and resemblance to nature in a work of pictorial art can have nothing to do with its aesthetic value, except possibly, to act detrimentally.³⁴

Within the formalist camp a certain commitment to man's psychic can be identified. This would be an intuitive relationship to, what Haftmann has called, an "organism of pure colour--man's entire emotional world."³⁵ Everything that man can perceive in his surroundings is to be found within the pictorial forms of color.

Though not fully accepted, as was the 19th century Impressionist theory, it cannot be denied that modern formalism well represents the democratic and scientifically oriented society. It is also true that in this desire to freely express the dynamics of science and of nature, human values may necessarily be sacrificed. The German Expressionist compassion for man could not accept Impressionist lack of observation beyond an experimental surface of man. This situation is again manifest in today's rebellion against, what has been called, "a dehumanization in which man, it seems, is to be reduced to an object of experiment."³⁶

The reality of man.--Expressionist destruction of detail provided the impetus for greater abstraction today; but, none the less, it preserved some visual form of man's image. Man's re-emphasis today is also distorted and dissected; but these images also attempt to retain

³³Rodman, The Insiders, p. 17.

³⁴Ibid., p. 20.

³⁵Haftmann, I, 365.

³⁶Selz, p. 12.

a meaningful visual statement for its contemporaries. There is also an Expressionist feeling for the cruel and demonic underlying the new image. Selz indicates this feeling in this description:

They show the smallness of man and his deep involvement in the vast masses of inorganic matter out of which he tries to emerge with toil and pain. They reveal the hidden presence of animal trends in the unconscious....They dare to emphasize certain elements and parts of the natural figure and to leave out others in the desire to express something which nature hides....There are demonic forces in every man which try to take possession of him, and the new image of man shows faces in which the state of being possessed is shockingly manifest. In others the fear of such possession or the anxiety at the thought of living is predominant, and again in others there are feelings of emptiness, meaninglessness and despair.³⁷

Perhaps, in some cases, this is a prelude to melodrama and to what critic, Bernard Berenson called a "mild nastiness."³⁸ Perhaps the usually unburdened spontaneity and freshness that modern formalism offers is also sacrificed. In any case the honesty in which the artist conceived his work would, seemingly, provide the essential test for the individual conscience.

Those who expound a reality of man would say that only a society with purpose would reflect in its art the common objects and values--moral, religious, and political. It is true that this could be called a non-conformist attitude in today's formalistic trend. On the other hand this non-conformity must be considered as mild in contrast to the change initiated by the Impressionists and now the modern formalists. The new image carries with it the catalyst of man's tradition which compromises with any age. The struggle to retain this image is not new. Now the struggle suddenly takes on the importance of an initial change when the figure completely disappears in non-objective work. Questions are asked. "What has become of us? What has happened to the reality of our lives?"³⁹ These are valid questions to ask today, but they seemingly cannot inspire a lasting image. To just simply present the human form for its own sake, contented and unchallenged, or continually revealed as the social pawn,

³⁷Ibid., p. 10.

³⁸Rodman, The Insiders, p. 18.

³⁹Selz, p. 9.

does not face man with eternal questions about himself; about the undefined inner regions. Rather, images evolving from these regions and, as Selz has put it, "the act of showing forth these effigies takes the place of politics and moral philosophy, and the showing forth must stand in its own right as artistic creation."⁴⁰ This is a daring act. The demonic, the cruel, the fantastic are unshakable elements in this image of man. The persistent presence of these forces continually undermines explanation and compel man to turn from outward things. Man's common surroundings, in turn, become the setting in which these forces operate, thus adding to the anxiety. The new image, therefore, places a paradoxical faith in the stability of the unreal. As an artistic creation, its surface reality cannot be avoided. The extent to which this reality is confronted is an individual matter. In imagery such as presented by Rodman's "Insiders," there is a dependence upon the graphics to directly involve themselves with man. As Rodman put it: "None of them feels at home (at least yet) with color."⁴¹

James Fitzsimmons has made the choice simple in his statement:

The contemporary artist has only one choice to make: will he live today or in the past? If he will live today, he abandons all preconceptions concerning the characteristics and mean of art. He becomes like the modern physicist, aware that he can know nothing in itself and nothing in advance.⁴²

This statement becomes a reality to the modern formalist who, perhaps feels that he should purely aspire to the present; an age requiring flexibility in the face of constantly changing conceptions of life. This reality could only materialize in a mind that is not totally narrowed by preconception. Therefore, the static visual preconceptions of man and nature could not possibly survive the modern destructive search for its own energetic being. Perhaps, in this sense, the only true contemporary is the extreme formalist. On the other hand, man's new image could only repudiate a statement of "either-or" philosophy. This image can only attempt to aspire to the totality of the

⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 12.

⁴¹ Rodman, Art in America, XLVI, 31.

⁴² Rodman, The Insiders, p. 24.

present in which the containment of man's compassion is a small segment. An honest attempt is made to recognize man in his technical world; it cannot sensibly be avoided.

Today's middle position occupied by the reality of man has, therefore, been predetermined. Its single strength lies in a common visual image of man's inner unknown. Its starkness can be attributed to the Expressionist spirit. The world it conveys is a two-dimensional, close involvement of the natural which further beckons to the unknown forces in all men and one man. The Expressionist individualism asserted in its time has been subdued in the new image. Today's spirit is perhaps more strongly apparent in what formalism offers. The psychic dwellings of Expressionism offer a closer parallelism. In a sense the "status quo" of man's recognizable image and surroundings engenders a feeling of stability for those lost in the quickened pace of abstract science. This could also mean, in an Expressionist sense, an escape from mechanization to the human concern and rebellion from a total acceptance of a systemized world of "signs." The initial concept offered is human and the visual result is human. But, as with the Expressionists, the total human concept necessarily includes a distorted world. This is also a doubtful world, and certainly can be a more fearful one.

"Insiders" and other imagists of man, according to Rodman, have a high regard for the "potential of education." This is characterized by what Rodman calls "Leonardo's pedagogic aphorism that 'strength is born of restraint and dies in freedom.'"⁴³ The apparent reaction here is to the purely intuitive stance taken in statements such as the following:

Georges Mathieu--When I paint, my mind must be a complete blank--no thought, no deliberation, no choice.⁴⁴

Jack Tworikov--If I have a slogan it is: no commitment. At a moment when there is admittedly little common ground, the best morality is not to have any.⁴⁵

Those artists taking the opposite stand would agree with this statement by James Kearns:

⁴³Ibid., p. 63.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 65.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 31.

Truth, in a work of art, is a perfect synthesis of the subjective and objective factors that went into its composition. A work in itself is important only as a vehicle for transmitting human expressions from one human being to another.⁴⁶

These statements present contrasting opinions as to the emphasis in a work of art; yet within themselves they all express a truth--a truth within the artist's context. It is in this spirit that the author's plastic interpretations are presented; and it is hoped that they are viewed with this statement in mind:

I am totally uninterested in decoration, nor do I hold it seemingly that works of art should essentially concern their author's world. I could call myself a realist, as I understand that world, one who expresses ideas, notions, feelings, and beliefs about life; every aspect of it. I do not abjurgate the great formal discoveries of the modern movement. Quite the opposite, my desire is to learn these lessons and to couple them to my purpose. I seek enrichment for my work in the natural world, in the world of man.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 86.

⁴⁷ Leonard Baskin, Art in America, XLIV (February, 1956), 48-49.

II. PLASTIC ANALYSIS

CONTENTS

PLASTIC ANALYSIS
OF STRUCTURES
BY THE METHOD OF
VARIABLES
AND THE METHOD OF
MOMENTS
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Introduction

Artists have ever turned to the print for the expression of specific ideas, impelled by an immediacy of purpose that often is alien to the slower more contemplative medium of painting; or to give wider circulation to an attitude, a feeling, a position that the inescapable singleness of a painting is incapable of...seeking for guidance in the print medium both learned and unlearned, ever aware of its long popular tradition, seeing in its quintessential black and whiteness, the savagery of Goya, the melancholy of Durer and the gentleness of Rembrandt.⁴⁸

It has been said that German sensibility was perhaps more inclined towards the graphic rather than the painting media. Of course, through painting, the German Expressionists found the emotional clash of intense color to be highly representative of their psychic quests. Yet, in the graphics (especially the woodcut) these artists found a means of directly conveying qualities of crudity and brutality. Form and color was simplified even more into a powerful soul-searching statement in black and white. Nolde related his characteristic grotesquerie to the print; while in the same media, Heckel, as it has been said, more adeptly presented his world of the confined and isolated.

In today's search for man's image there is also a reaffirmation of black and white; but in graphic means which stand alone as expressive entities. The need fulfilled here is one of simplicity and stark reality; but also of a colorless unknown. Leonard Baskin, one of man's current disciples, has stated:

Black has enraptured many before us. Erasmus in writing of Durer holds him greater than Apelles, because he did without the blandishments of color. Black is my light, my color, because I can't imagine color adding either intensity or giving insight. Now this is true for me. Whether it is further true that black is the tonality of rage, of dissent, of violence and unmercifulness, of savagery and of an unguarded direct tenderness, one cannot say.

⁴⁸ William S. Lieberman, "One Classic, One Newcomer: Feininger, Baskin," Art News, LIV (May, 1955), 31.

Surely it is true that Black, which encompasses all of the colors, encompasses too all of life. Testimony of this is in the etchings of Rembrandt and Durer and Daumier.⁴⁹

The author's supporting works, in this thesis, are inheritors of an Expressionist medieval mysticism and part of the contemporary, direct involvement with the natural world of man. The images presented are of the natural world; yet they represent only the facade of reality. They exist where things cannot be trusted; where the other lurks to "sneer beneath the surface;" where nature becomes an unfamiliar realm.⁵⁰ Their visual naturalness seems to offer stability for as long as their Blacks are not contemplated.

The goal is not morbidity for its own sake. What grotesquerie may be present is the result of attempting to obtain an unblatished beauty from those things which are not considered beautiful. The outward beauty of nature can hide a basic uncomprehensible savagery. Likewise, man and the common objects he values pitifully hold only a temporary place in time's decay. Time and the unknown continually plague man and nature. This predicament does not seem to lend itself to a bombastic and contortionist sentiment but rather to the quiet and restraint of a cautious world. In this world sound and movement of the living are indicated; yet their utterances appear muffled and their movements contained.

⁴⁹Rodman, The Insiders, p. 96.

⁵⁰Haftmann, II, p. 28.

Iconography

Both landscapes (Plate 1) (Plate 2) are familiar to man. Their natural contact with nature is a visual experience of every man at one time or another. Yet, as one further lingers, these landscapes seem to present an otherworldly feeling. Rilke, in his book on German naturalism, best explains this feeling:

...landscapes are something alien to us, that we are terribly alone among trees that blossom and torrents that flow by. The farther back we go, the more alien and more cruel become the creatures we encounter. Thus we become convinced that in the background we shall find nature, the most cruel and most alien of all.⁵¹

It is silent nature with black light. Its trees seem to form a confining roof which pushes man down through this unknown; abruptly ending in a void.

Man is again placed in an alien setting (Plate 3). The objects are familiar, but what lies within this interior is again unknown; except, perhaps for a familiar stale odor of time. An undefined light is emitted. Man may be compelled to enter from this illuminated world; but again only too cautiously. A homage is presented (Plate 4) to man's attempt to reason with those unknown forces; but it is a futile attempt. A full understanding can never be reached. The grandeur of this structure, first conceived by man to be the ultimate step towards understanding, exists only to teeter from the effects of time.

Who are the creatures and who are the people contained in this other world? These beings are outwardly familiar; yet they present the feeling they can never quite become part of the rational world. This feeling may be inspired in a bird's skeletal form (Plate 6). Once a living part of nature, it has been caught in the transfixed state of

⁵¹Ibid., I, p. 51.

wanting to remain a part of that which once was. It is possessed in a state of being and yet not being. In this struggle it almost uncomfortably bristles with remnants of life; but to no avail. An animal in a similar state (Plate 7), with confined remnants of living energy, cries into a soundless void.

Man has the means and desire to attempt to understand his own existence; but when confronted by the unfamiliar (Plate 5), rational confidence turns to a fearful distrust of this realm in which he always will feel alienated. Or, in a state of being possessed he appears to only gaze or move transfixingly within the shallow space of his natural existence. He becomes the isolated, the silent, the unknown behind a false mask of reality (Plate 8) (Plate 9) (Plate 10).



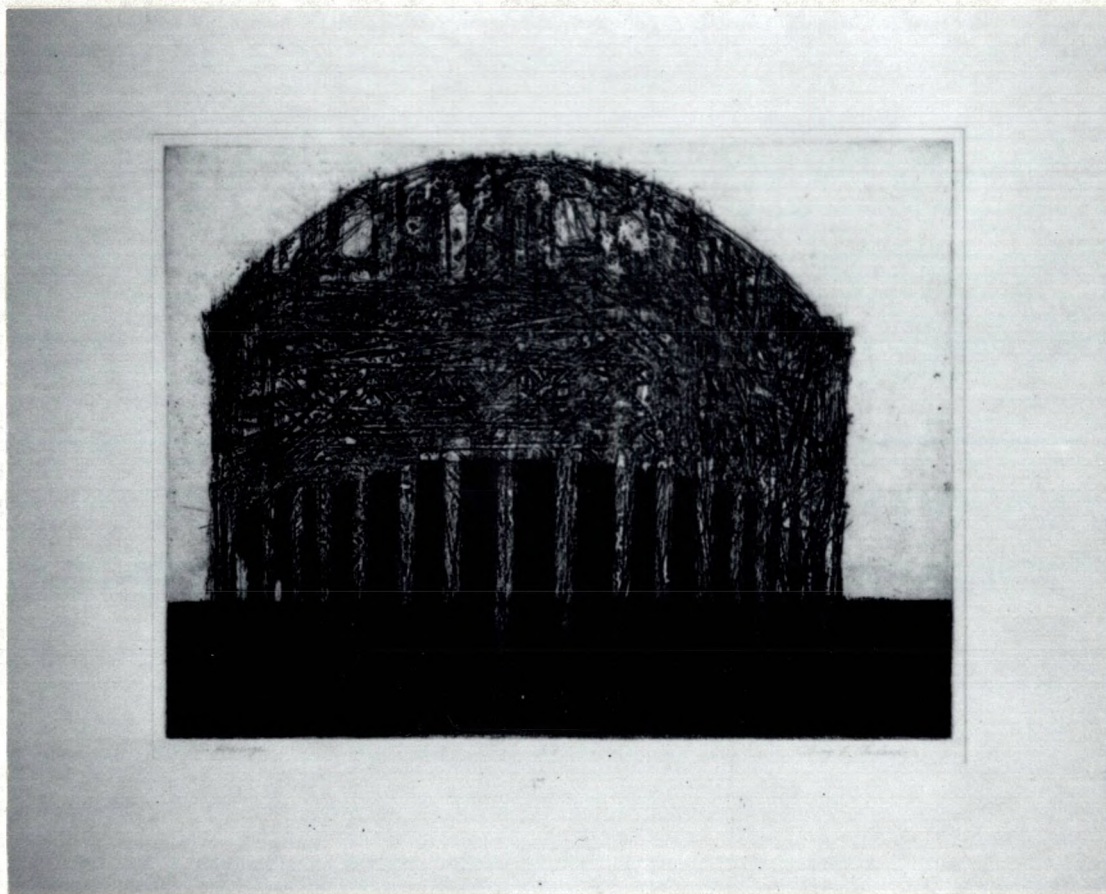
1. " . . . landscapes are something alien to us, that we are terribly alone among trees that blossom and torrents that flow by."



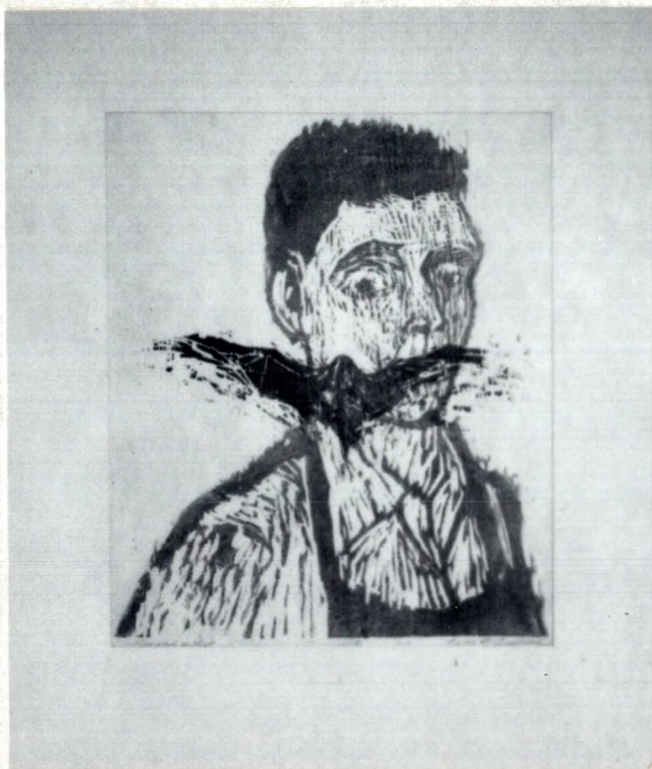
2. The tree forms nature's confining roof.



3. What lies within this interior is again unknown.



4. The grandeur of this structure exists only to feel the effects of time.



5. Rational confidence turns only to a fearful distrust.



6. It almost uncomfortably bristles with remnants of life.



7. In this world sound and movement of the living are indicated; yet their utterances appear muffled and their movements contained.



8. She stands in a transfixed gaze; perhaps it signifies a state of possession.



9. She runs in a two dimensional world; perhaps again in a possessed state.



10. She is the personification of another world-
isolated, silent, and unknown.

APPENDIX

Illustration Particulars

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